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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/BSC,
NSC FOR TOM SHANNON AND MIKE DEMPSEY
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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH TUCUMAN PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR AND
LEADING JOURNALISTS

1. (SBU) Summary: On September 28-29, Pasoffs and Poloff met with Tucuman Governor Jose Jorge Alperovich and leading journalists in the province. The meeting with the Governor was positive and covered key issues facing the province, such as economic reform, relations with the national government, and economic development. The journalists Emboffs that met with provided a wealth of information about Tucuman politics and said they looked forward to future contacts with the Embassy. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Governor Alperovich was candid during his September 29 meeting with Emboffs, encouraging them to ask any type of question. He covered issues ranging from economic reform, relations with the GOA, and the state of the economy in Tucuman. The Governor stated that he thought the Fiscal Responsibility Law recently passed by the National Congress would have no trouble passing in Tucuman, although he felt the law would have little practical effect in the province, as Tucuman already had a strict financial responsibility law. (Note: The Tucuman legislature passed the Fiscal Responsibility Law on October 1, becoming the second province in the country to approve the new law.) He thought co-participation reform was not necessary and said it is not a priority for his administration. He said he did not want to fight with Buenos Aires over an extra percentage point or two of co-participation funds, and would rather focus on more important issues for the province. He described his relations with the national government as being good and that he was satisfied with the resources he received from the GOA. He said that financial mismanagement by previous governors, and not a lack of funds from Buenos Aires, were the source of past funding problems for Tucuman. He admitted that although the province had many resources, especially in the agricultural sector, poverty was still a problem in Tucuman. He emphasized however, that the province has enjoyed a much lower rate of unemployment over the past three years compared with the rest of the country. The Governor also highlighted his efforts to bring in outside investment from the United States, China, and Chile, the development of a new railroad service, and the booming construction industry in the province. Governor Alperovich closed the meeting by mentioning he planned to travel to Washington, DC this December.

3. (SBU) BIO NOTE: Jose Alperovich was elected governor in October 2003, having served as a Peronist Party (PJ) Senator in the National Congress. He originally was a member of the Radical Civil Union Party (UCR). A son of Jewish, Lithuanian immigrants, Alperovich faced legal hurdles in his bid for governor, as the Tucuman Constitution required that all governors be Catholic. A legal ruling in the province allowing non-Catholics to become governor cleared the way for his election. Leading journalists described the governor's relationship with the Kirchner government as good on administrative matters, but much cooler on a personal level. Alperovich is tied to the Duhalde camp within the PJ, having a personal connection to Duhalde through his father and the father of Duhalde's former Central Bank head, Mario Blejer. Journalist German Valdez also reported that Kirchner was unhappy with the governor because he was met by protesters/piqueteros on his first trip to Tucuman as President in July that blocked his motorcade coming from the airport. Valdez said Kirchner was also unhappy with the fact the province had two senators and three deputies from the family of ex-military governor and dirty war criminal, Antonio Bussi, as Kirchner was attempting to assert his authority over the military on a national level.

4. (SBU) Emboffs met with leading journalists from the province, including Maximo Garcia Hamilton and Ricardo Le Fort from El Siglo, Carlos Abrehu and Jose Pochat from La Gaceta, and German Valdez from MC Radio & TV. All of the journalists were pleased to meet with US Embassy officials and told Emboffs that they were looking forward to future close cooperation with Pasoffs. La Gaceta is the oldest daily newspaper in the province, with the largest readership. El Siglo formed as an offshoot of La Gaceta 14 years ago due to a conflict within the family that owns La Gaceta. German Valdez is the leading radio and television journalist in

Tucuman, who has been a good contact for many years for the Embassy.

GUTIERREZ